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International Society for the History and Bibliography of Herpetology



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The Society

The **ISHBH** is a not-for-profit organization established to bring together individuals for whom the history and bibliography of herpetology is appealing, to promote the knowledge of related topics among members and the general public, and to promote research. Membership is open to anyone who shares the aims of the Society.

Membership

The biennial fees for 2008-2009 are as follows: Benefactor US\$100, Sponsoring US\$50, and Regular US\$30. Lifetime membership starting from 2008 is US\$300. Institutions pay minimum US\$50. The fee includes a subscription of two volumes to the Society's journal *Bibliotheca Herpetologica*. Membership application forms that include the possibility to order back issues can be found on our website. Payment can be made by personal check or money order in USD drawn on a US bank sent to the Secretary-Treasurer or the Chairperson. Payment can also be made by transfer in euro to PlusGirot, Sweden, IBAN SE83 9500 0099 6042 0455 1206, BIC NDEASESS. Payment by credit card can be made on the Internet to Bibliomania!, www.herplit.com. Bibliomania! has kindly offered the assistance in collection membership dues and the Society is sincerely indebted for the service provided gratis by Breck Bartholomew and staff. Current members will be contacted in due course with renewal information.

Members are encouraged to contribute with articles, essays, news of meetings, hints on antiquarian trade, book reviews and other issues associated with herpetology. The Society organizes seminars, visits to libraries, museums, etc. in connection with herpetological meetings with international participation. The Society works to facilitate informal contacts among members so that the members can meet, offer support in knowledge and transact exchanges of literature.

Correspondence to the Society shall be addressed directly to a Committee member or officer, either by post or email.

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Instructions for Authors

Authors submitting a manuscript do so on the understanding that the work has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere. Manuscripts are peer reviewed.

The language of *Bibliotheca Herpetologica* is English. Consult the latest issue of *Bibliotheca Herpetologica* for article format. The Editor reserves the right to adjust style to maintain uniformity.

Manuscripts and illustrations should be submitted to the Editor in electronic form. Color illustrations other than used for the cover will be at the author's expense. The ISHBH cannot take responsibility for material sent by post.

www.t-ad.net/ishbh

Society News

2008 Annual Meeting

The ISHBH 2008 annual meeting was held as planned on 24 July in Montreal, P. Québec, Canada in conjunction with the Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. The place for our traditional luncheon, this time at the Hungarian bistro Café Rococo had proficiently been located by our vice Chairperson Mr. Ronald A. Javitch, who is resident in Montréal. Ron, we thank you all for the delicious meals! The associated business meeting was attended by seven members and one guest. There were no new nominees for the Executive Committee and all of the current officers, except the Editor, who had declined to stand for another period, were re-elected. Prospective candidates were named for the post as Editor, which the Executive Committee was given the authority to work from. Subsequently, Dr. Chris J. Bell has been appointed as Editor and elected as an officer of the Executive Committee. His mandate will begin with *Bibliotheca Herpetologica* 8(2).

Two field trips were arranged after the meeting. The first was a visit to the private library of the *Ronald A. Javitch Natural History Rare Book Foundation*. The guests were helped through the labyrinths of book shelves by Mr. Javitch as well as the librarian Tracy, who also proudly displayed the beautiful roof garden that she nurses when not caring for the library and assisting Mr. Javitch in his scholarly research. The library occupies several floors in a spacious building and is focused on herpetology, entomology, gardening, and the history of science. There is a rare book room, which naturally attracted the interest of many from the audience but the other sections with their overwhelming numbers of specialty books were truly impressive to any natural history bibliophile.

The famous *Osler Library* on the campus of McGill University is only a short walk from the Javitch Foundation and was visited through another prearrangement. Sir William Osler (1849-1919) was a Canadian physician who assembled a large library, especially on the history of medicine that he willed to McGill University. The bequest contained some 8,000 volumes but it has since grown to well over three times that number. Although it is not a library directly herpetological in content, the uniqueness of the books was fully appreciated by the visitors of the Society and the interior of the library is enchanting. There are indeed cross borders between medicine and herpetology, so several old books on serpents, snake venoms and their treatments could be recognized on the shelves. Our thanks are directed to the librarians at McGill.

The group expressed its very special thanks to Ronald Javitch for organizing the afternoon's activities.

Lajos Méhely's *Herpetologia Hungarica* – funds for its publication are being sought

This issue contains an interesting biography of the well-known Hungarian author Lajos Méhely, who contributed a wealth of information not only on the reptiles of his home country, but those of other areas of the globe, and on zoology in general. The paper is focused on Méhely's opus magnum, a manuscript on the herpetological fauna of Hungary, which at that time covered a much larger territory than today. The manuscript has never been published and its story is told in full in the paper. The authors are seeking individuals or institutions to step forward and contribute the financial resources to realize the publication of this important and historical work.

The Herpetological Legacy of Linnaeus

The Linnaeus symposium that was held last year in St. Louis, USA was the first of its kind and it was agreed by the participants and the Executive Committee that the proceedings of the symposium should be published. These are now in an advanced stage and it is our aim to have them published early in 2009.

Membership dues

The membership dues should be renewed for the biennial 2008 and 2009 (unless you paid for 2007 and 2008). The dues are unchanged. Please refer to page 2 for details how to renew. The Proceedings of the Linnaean symposium will be included in the membership fee.

Sekretär

Sekretär is a journal similar to *Bibliotheca Herpetologica* that is published twice yearly by *Beiträge zur Literatur und Geschichte der Herpetologie und Terrarienkunde*, a working group of the German society *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Herpetologie und Terrarienkunde* (DGHT). Volume 7, Heft 1 (2007) was briefly mentioned in the last issue of *Bibliotheca Herpetologica*. After this, another two numbers have been published. As they maintain, on the whole, a high standard of herpetological history and bibliography, albeit in German, we strongly recommend our members to consider membership. The contents of the journals and other information of the working group can be seen on their website www.lght.de.

Verlag Fines Mundi

Verlag Fines Mundi is a German publisher (www.fines-mundi.de) located in Saarbrücken that is quite new on the market and is specializing on high quality reprints of old literature, especially natural history, travels and expeditions, with quite few titles that are herpetological. They have printed many of the narratives of old voyages. As these are so expensive to be unattainable for most people as

complete sets, and the herpetological sections rarely are offered alone on the antiquarian market, the Fines Mundi reprints offer a chance to obtain good quality facsimiles of some of these scarce works at a reasonable price. Their program is to digitize more than 20 books every month. The website, so far in German only, provides just a little information, as most pages display “under construction” but there is a pdf-list of published reprints (Verlagsverzeichnis). However, this is last updated in October 4, 2007 and several herpetological titles have been released since. Quality of the paper and binding are emphasized and they provide bindings in half leather with marbled boards. The prices are generally quite reasonable, hovering about € 100 each for books in quarto with colored plates. The photocopies of the plates are truthful to the original coloring but could apparently vary, as a copy with the plates not fully matching the original full bodied handcolorings has been reported.

Among the titles available are: Thomas Bell (1836-42) A Monograph of the Testudinata (€150), Johann David Schöpf (1792-1801) Naturgeschichte der Schildkröten (€96), Léon Vaillant et Guillaume Grandidier (1910) Histoire Physique – Naturelle et Politique de Madagascar – Histoire Naturelle des Reptiles – Première Partie: Crocodiles et Tortues (€85), John Anderson (1898) Zoology of Egypt. Vol. 1 Reptilia and Amphibia (uncolored plates; price not reported), and Wilhelm C. H. Peters (1882) Naturwissenschaftliche Reise nach Mossam-bique – Zoologie 3 Amphibien (with 28 of the 33 plates colored; €151).

Richard Wahlgren

About the cover

The Mediterranean House Gecko by Lajos Méhely in the Unpublished *Herpetologia Hungarica*

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The title page is a reproduction of the single preserved print proof of plate 2 originally made in watercolor for Lajos Méhely's (1862-1953) still unpublished *Herpetologia Hungarica* (see page 10), depicting the Mediterranean House Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*). The original image size is 280 mm high by 202 mm wide.

The species was described as *Lacerta turcica* by Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* (1758: 202), based on a specimen collected in Turkey, that George Edwards (1694-1773) described and depicted (Edwards 1751: 204; 204).

Having its origin in the Middle East (Carranza & Arnold 2006), it spread westwards occupying the Mediterranean areas of Europe, Africa and Asia, south to the Arabian Peninsula and eastwards to India. It has been introduced to Canary Islands, United States of America, Mexico, Belize, Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Argentina (Salvador 1981; Carranza & Arnold 2006).

The Mediterranean House Gecko is light brown or grayish above, with many black and white tubercles on the back and tail, with a white venter (Salvador 1981). It reaches 10 cm in total length. It occurs chiefly at low elevation, is crepuscular and nocturnal and hunts insects, often those that are attracted by lights in anthropogenic habitats. The males emit chirping calls, possibly to defend territories. It can also make a squeaking sound.

Méhely presented the species on nine pages of the first manuscript volume of *Herpetologia Hungarica*. He included the taxon in the work as it was known from Rijeka (Croatia), which had historically been part of Hungary. In addition to the morphological descriptions mostly based on the literature, Méhely provided natural history notes on the gecko, based on observations he made on six captive specimens originating from Split (Croatia) and Ragusa (Italy), he had received from his colleague and friend Dr. Franz Werner (1867-1939).

References

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Storage and Indexing of Herpetological Reprints, a Personal View

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Several systems are commonly used for storing of herpetological reprints and none alone is perfect. It is controversial as to which are the best methods. After all, with the reprints once filed away they become useless if there is not a reliable retrieval system.

A few years ago I had the privilege of going through a friend's archive of herpetological reprints. This file was used by graduate students as well as the professor. Many reprints were filed out of place; many were tattered around the edges and many were duplications with different numbers. His secretaries had assisted in arranging the file but over the years had not been consistent. When a reprint is misfiled for some reason, for all practical purposes it is "lost". For the labor to put the archive back in order I was to have any duplicates I wished and many were added to my personal library. I will here discuss various systems of filing and indexing reprints when these are amassed in any such magnitude that an order is deemed necessary.

THE NATURE OF A REPRINT AND OTHER PAMPHLETS

When an author has published an article in a journal he usually receives specially printed leaflet copies of the article only. These come sometimes with wrappers and sometimes without. The author distributes the reprints free to colleagues and anybody can request and will usually receive a copy by mail. Reprints, or separates as they also are called, can be sold by the publisher as well. An author often inscribes the separate with a greeting on the front page. Lately, with the introduction

of the Internet reprints are also disbursed as pdf copies on email or available free on websites for printing by the receiver. Reprints are also available second hand at many websites and at antiquarian book dealers' tables at herpetological events. Some reprints, especially the old and beautifully illustrated, can fetch considerable prices. With respect to storage I embrace here also printed materials, such as tiny books, chapters from books, old dissertations, poster prints, extracted leaves from magazines, and commercial leaflets within the herpetological discipline.

FILING ORDER

File in the order of their acquisition

The reprints arranged in the order of their acquisition is the first system that I became aware of and the system used by my friend. This logical method entails numbering each reprint, usually in the upper right corner, and making an author card or equivalent electronic record with that number and the cards filed alphabetically. Cards can be filed by author and year, which is normal, or by title. Finding the reprint one had to go to the card file and look through that author cards to find the number to go with a given reprint. One disadvantage comes to mind quickly. Storing can be quite cumbersome, as reprint sizes vary considerably. A large container has to be accounted for them all and tattering around the edges of the larger reprints is a risk when looking for smaller ones. One certainly does not want to combine fragile 19th century reprints with modern ones. To my mind filing by accession number is not a desirable method.

File by subject

Filing by subject could be a nice system especially if one has no register of the reprint library, as it would not be too difficult to track required reprints when doing a particular research. A problem with this method is that some reprints could be filed under a number of different subjects or subheadings and in a discipline, such as herpetology the variants of subjects could be many. Again, one has to provide space measured for the largest reprint to accommodate all sizes.

File by author

Filing by author is a good method when one does not maintain a register, as one can easily find any reprint if the first author's name is known. Usually the senior author is used, but not always. In combination with Zoological Record this system works particularly well, as a forgotten author name can be traced by subject, taxon, or geographic region. Again, this system has a disadvantage as reprints are of various sizes, which require large space and can lead to tattered edges.

File by journal

Reprints come from journals and can be stored in this order by year of publication. This is the method I use. Filing by journal saves space as the uniformity of size is consistent. A dilemma with this system is that reprints come from so many different journals even for a subject restricted to herpetology; some could be really unusual and it will not be viable to maintain files for all journals. Without a register it is difficult to find a particular article even when one knows the author but not where and when it was published.

The best solution will probably be to use a combination of different filing methods I mentioned above.

STORAGE

Dust can be a problem as well as unwanted pests such as cockroaches, booklouse (*Liposcelis*

bostrychophila), silverfish (*Lepisma saccharina*), moths (*Atropos*), worms and rats and they can be a nuisance no matter what method is used for storage. Another problem is water — if you live in a moist climate or suffer roof or plumbing leakage. These potential risks should anyway be taken into account when choosing storage solutions.

Reprints can be filed in boxes, metal file cabinets, in hanging folder cabinets, in plastic folders in binders, or in "egg crates".

Boxes

Boxes can come in various models and sizes. They can be expensively tailor-made by a bookbinder, even with a spine and boards that look like a book. This could be a solution for the really dear reprints. Special boxes are also commercially available, either completely enclosed i.e. capsule style, or open backed. Check with the libraries in your area to see if they have discarded capsules. The cheapest solution and maybe that with the best result comes from looking around for free cardboard boxes, e.g. 12-bottle wine size, in a uniform style. Ask the shop assistant to open them carefully when he unpacks the bottles so the lids are kept intact. When using cardboard boxes with the reprint standing up, one should ensure they are kept quite full, as the reprints otherwise easily can fall over and be contorted. Any adjustable shelving, such as steel or wooden, will do for storing print boxes.

File cabinets

Many file cabinets are specifically produced for storing paper documents with the format of reprints. With manila envelopes the reprints can be gathered by author or subject. For hanging folder cabinets one must find a system to organize the reprints in the folders, as each has a rather limited capacity of storage. If a file folder in a cabinet becomes too large more than one has to be used or they are transferred to reprint boxes. Most reprints can be filed in letter size cabinets but for some one has to use legal size cabinets. As one's reprint collection

grows more cabinets have to be obtained and shifting of folders to another system becomes necessary.

Plastic folders in binders

Some reprints, especially older and fragile ones and these not so bulky I keep in individual transparent plastic jackets for filing in a ring binder. On the back of the binder I can mark the contents, be it a specific author, journal or subject. However, plastic melts quickly and ruins the contents if exposed to heat from a fire to the building that ordinary paper may resist.

Egg crates

Inexpensive compared to the file cabinets are "egg crates", i.e. piling the reprints in stacks spread out on any available surface.

The egg crate method can be troublesome unless one has unlimited space to have them spread out. However, one's stacking and unstacking them could be harmful to the reprints in the long run.

Journals

Journals in any long run can hardly stand by themselves without plenty of shelving support. Some people prefer to have their serial journals bound and shelved as books. Instead of binding my journals I invested that money into more reprints and books. Journals such as *Copeia*, *Herpetologica*, *Journal of Herpetology*, and *American Museum Novitates*, as well as various *Occasional Papers* I store chronologically in boxes. Those with just a few numbers I keep in file folders in file cabinets. Some infrequent periodicals such as "*Special Publications*" which are lengthy are usually placed on shelves as books. In my library I do not, with rare exceptions, keep reprints from journals that I subscribe to. With limited space this became necessary. Any reprints I receive in this category I pass on to others.

Multiple users

For those people having multiple users of their libraries problems may easily crop up. Many times the item is not returned to its proper place. Some, therefore, insist that the item not be returned to the storage area but be placed in a certain location to be returned to the file by the owner or other designated persons. Some owners also insist that the item be checked out and in by some method to prevent it being "lost."

INDEXING

Cards

For each reprint I acquire I make a minimum of three 3x5 inch index cards, one filed by title, the other by journal and the third by author. If more than one author then a card is made for each author and each card is filed alphabetically. Alphabet cards are used for the title cards. Sometimes cards are made out and other times not, it depends on the topic and importance of the reprint. All general biology journals I receive with articles of a herpetological nature in them have the articles catalogued as though they are a reprint. The system has led to many thousands of cards being typed up with many additional hours spent filing them. It gives me the advantage of having a cross-file system by either knowing the title, journal, or author(s) of the item being looked for. While this method is not perfect it has worked well for me. A problem (caused by me) is not placing the reprints back right away, but rather being placed in a stack to be filed, to look at a little later, working on, and then some being "mislaid" (temporarily), especially since everything is in my home and occasionally I have to "hide" things away.

Computer Registration

The use of the computer for indexing can be handy but since my expertise in this usage is limited I will not dwell upon this. EndNote and Book Collector (Collectorz) are two commercial applications for indexing libraries, both accessing other web-based bibliographic

databases. Book Collector is somewhat cheaper but is not really constructed for handling reprint indexing. However, I have been advised how useful Excel can be for registration of books and reprints. Any amount of text characters can be stored in the cells and with all variances of formats. One row should be used for each title. Use one cell for each of these columns: author, year of publication (2 cells; one for sorting and the next for additional information), title and edition, storage index, place of publication, form (such as *reprint from; removed from, in*), journal and issue or publisher, pagination, assembly description and size, language, accession date, source, price, any comments, subject keys (1 or 2 cells), a sequential number, and possibly a date of input.

A significant advantage with Excel is that the data can be sorted in any of the relevant columns, which can be very handy. Any amount of information, from just one title to the whole library, can easily be exported to Word for comprehensive printing or any other application. The format of a title can be rearranged by moving columns before cut and paste maneuvers depending on the purpose, e.g. creating the reference list to an article, collation with another citation, or putting it on a sale list of duplicates. As authors' names

often are spelled differently from time to time, an extra column placed to the left should be used for a uniform spelling and without any special diacritical marks, such as accent or umlaut. This column is convenient to use for sorting authors alphabetically and also to search for an author name without being concerned with diacritical marks.

If one has already started on a card system one can continue with the registration to a computer file and print cards in the formats of the old card file text.

CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this article I have tried to put forth methods of reprint storage most commonly used by workers and to discuss indexing. Whatever system is used the accessibility of the reprint when needed is the most important thing. No system is fool-proof or perfect but any system is an improvement on disorder.

My thanks are extended to the Editors for information about the computer registration and for other courtesies.

Revised and accepted September 16, 2008

Lajos Méhely's *Herpetologia Hungarica*, a Review of a Masterpiece of the Hungarian Herpetological Literature

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Introduction

The most legendary Hungarian zoologist of the 20th century and one of the leading European herpetologists of the early part of the period was Lajos Méhely (1862–1953). He published over 250 papers and books (Dely 1967) on many aspects of zoology: evolution, ecology, and taxonomy, including many on amphibians, reptiles, bats, and several groups of invertebrates (Boros & Dely 1967). Several of his papers and the great originality of the ideas therein are known and appreciated worldwide. His name is still familiar as a result of the over 70 new taxa he described (Dely 1967), because of the genus *Mehelya* (Csiki, 1903) and because of the 20-plus species named after him (Dely 1967), like *Xenorhina mehelyi* (Boulenger, 1898), *Agama mehelyi* Tornier, 1902, and *Rana mehelyi* Bolkay, 1911. Comprehensive biographies of Lajos Méhely were published by Boros & Dely (1967), Dely (1967) and Adler (1989: 65). Yet his longest work, *Herpetologia Hungarica*, presenting the reptiles of historical Hungary (then encompassing areas now within the borders of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania) in text and illustrations, was never published. We shall present the history of this remarkable work and discuss in some detail the preserved manuscript and the accompanying plates.

Herpetologia Hungarica

In his zoological career Lajos Méhely held several positions, such as the directorial chair of the Zoological Department of the Hungarian

Natural History Museum (1912–1915), and professor of zoology at the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest (1915–1932). Soon after graduating from the Budapest University in 1885 he spent 12 years as a biology teacher at the Brassó/Braşov/Kronstadt State Realgymnasium. This was a very productive period of his life. In these years Méhely compiled the backbone of many monographs published later and wrote *Herpetologia Hungarica*. His most important herpetological works published during these years were on a new *Triton* for the Hungarian fauna (then *Triton montandoni* Boulenger, 1880; Méhely 1891), on the Hungarian brown frogs (Méhely 1892), a description of a new viper (then *Vipera rakosiensis*; Méhely 1894) and on the vipers *Vipera berus* (Linnaeus, 1758), 1758 and *Vipera ursinii* (Bonaparte, 1835) in Hungary (Méhely 1895).

We know from Méhely's (1932) narrative that he started with the manuscript following a letter of 26 April 1893 by Géza Entz Sr. (1842–1919), who was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Entz informed Méhely that the Academy planned to advertise a grant of 1,200 forints for a monograph of the Hungarian reptiles based on original research.

The Academy published the advertisement of the Bézsán prize¹ in the May 1893 issue of their journal *Akadémiai Értesítő* (Szily 1893). Applicants were required to submit their contribution before 30 September 1896 as a paginated manuscript copy written by someone else (Szily 1893). The applicants were to remain anonymous, but provide a code phrase in

a form of a motto and a sealed envelope containing the same motto and the name of the author. The seals should not be broken until a decision was taken by the Academy.

In the autumn of 1896 Méhely submitted his 666-page long, bound manuscript titled *Herpetologia Hungarica. Monograph of the Hungarian reptiles (Herpetologia Hungarica. A magyarországi csúszómászók (Reptilia) monográphiája)* and 29 separately bound watercolor paintings entitled *The reptiles of the Hungarian kingdom. 1896 (A Magyar királyság csúszómászói. 1896)* (Szily 1897). He used as his motto a famous phrase from the poem *Huszt* by Ferenc Kölcsey (1790-1838), author of the Hungarian national anthem: *Do, create, enrich, and the country will arise* (Anonymous 1896a).

Méhely's was the only application. It was reviewed by three well known zoologists, namely Géza Entz Sr, Géza Horváth (1847-1937) and Jenő Dáday (1855-1920), all members of the Academy (Anonymous, 1896b). It appealed to them and the Academy General meeting in 1897 granted Méhely the prize (Szily 1897). The only deficiency mentioned was the lack of a table of contents, which was expected to be prepared in time for the publication (Szily 1897). The Academy had never given such a positive review before: "None of the present herpetological works could compete with the submitted manuscript" (Szily 1897), "The watercolors, imitating nature, are real masterworks" (Méhely, 1929b).

In 1914 Méhely agreed with the Royal Hungarian Natural History Society² in Budapest to print 2,500 copies of the 22 plates ready to that date for a popular work. These were ordered from the Frankfurt am Main, Germany based printing company, Werner u. Winter. However, Méhely did not like the background to some of the plates: several print proof versions exist of five plates (24, 27, 35, 36, 39) with the animals in different environments. According to Csiki (1929a), these were redrawn by famous Hungarian artists, like Géza Vastagh (1866-1919) and Jenő Koszkol (1868-1935), but other evidence corroborating this statement has not been found. Probably this was only an allegation by Csiki in a dispute with Méhely. It is, after all, unlikely that Méhely would have agreed to have his plates redrawn by someone else.

The first 500 copies of each plate were paid by Méhely from the 50,000 gold-crowns he had received from the Ministry of Culture to print *Herpetologia Hungarica*. The remaining plates (circa 50,000) were dispatched by Werner u. Winter in 1924 to the Natural History Society, Budapest. However, Méhely by this time considered the text outdated and in need of improvement. Previously its publication as whole was delayed first due to financial difficulties, and thereafter due to World War I. An abbreviated version of the Viperidae part was published (Méhely 1912) containing three of the original plates in black and white depicting *Vipera berus* (p. 23), *Vipera ursinii* (p. 31) and *Vipera ammodytes* (p. 39).

¹ The Bézsán prize of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1874, after the Baron József Bézsán (1816-1873) from Dunaszecső, president of the court of justice from Pest donated to the Academy 40,000 forints in his testament dated February 4, 1873 (Anonymous 1891). From the interest the Academy should have granted at least 1,000 forints to projects that significantly contribute to the knowledge in natural sciences and humanities. The Academy decided to advertise the prize every third year and to reward the winning application with 1,200 forints. The prize was allocated for the last time in 1932 (Fekete 2000).

² The Hungarian Natural History Society (Magyar Természettudományi Társulat) was officially founded in Pest on June 13, 1831 (Beck 1998), and was acting after 1843 as the Royal Hungarian Natural History Society (Királyi Magyar Természettudományi Társulat). After the fall of the 1848-1849 revolution it held its first meeting in 1850, and later organized scientific groups and meetings, and published the almanac "A Királyi Magyar Természettudományi Társulat Évkönyvei". From 1860 the Society started publishing the journal "Természettudományi Közlöny". In 1953 the Society resumed its activity under the name Society for Popularization of Scientific Knowledge (Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat) (Horváth & Korsós 1994). It is still active and publishes its journal as "Természet Világa".

The plates were at an unknown time transferred to the Collection on History of Science of the Hungarian Natural History Museum (HNHM). The original paintings have not yet been traced except for two that are kept in HNHM and the Archive of the Eötvös Loránd University's Library, Budapest (AELTE).

The scientific community rated these watercolor paintings highly as signified by the flattering statements by the herpetologists Franz Werner (1867–1939) “Vor allem nehmen Sie den Ausdruck meiner aufrichtigen Bewunderung für Ihre meisterhafte Abbildung der *Lacerta fiumana* und *striata* entgegen. Ich bin entzückt davon.” and by George Albert Boulenger (1858–1937) “The specimen plate which you send me for inspection, representing *Coluber longissimus* in lifelike attitude, is simply exquisite.” (Méhely 1929b).

The prize and the financial support were envied and debated by many zoologists. As the printing of the manuscript was deferred further, entomologist Ernő Csiki (1875–1954), who succeeded Méhely as director of the Zoological Department of the Hungarian Natural History Museum, even accused Méhely of embezzlement (Csiki 1929b, 1931). The conflict arose following a harsh criticism by Méhely (1929a) of the work *Isopoda terrestria Hungariae* written by Csiki (1926). This incident later resulted in several critical essays published in zoological journals (e.g. Csiki 1929b), but also in antagonistic wars of words in local newspapers (e.g. Méhely 1929b, Csiki 1929a), and in private publications (Csiki 1931, Méhely 1933). They even went to court for a trial, which lasted for more than a year. Judgment ruled in the favor of Méhely. In a letter written on 8 May 1931 Méhely resigned his membership in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Anonymous 1931), due to the negative stance the Academy took towards him when he was struggling against Csiki's accusations. Once the dispute was even close to a duel, which Csiki, however, evaded.

One hundred numbered volumes with 22 color plates each were eventually assembled from the stock of plates in 1991 for the 6th Ordinary General Meeting of the Societas Europaea Herpetologica (Dely & Korsós 1991). The elegant atlas folder in oblong quarto is accompanied with three pages of explanatory comments and index of plates.

Form and content of the text

The manuscript is preserved in AELTE. After the review by the Academy the manuscript was returned to Méhely to prepare it for printing, thus he was able to complete and correct several parts and add new species that he subsequently found, such as *Lacerta taurica*. The text is written on large (35 x 21 cm) sheets in two volumes, a large sized, now unbound volume of 596 pages (six paginated pages are blank) and another bound volume of 77 pages. There are 44–45 rows per page, each row containing 75–80 characters. A table of contents is provided in Table 1. We have cited scientific names as they appear in the manuscript. For corresponding modern names refer to Table 2.

The first volume is the anonymously written copy submitted to the Academy. The first six pages are missing, and the whole introductory chapter contains several cross-outs and additions. It contains 24 tables, four phylogenetic trees and a drawing. The detailed description for each native species is split into the following headings: synonymy (a “complete” list of synonyms was prepared), body proportions (subsequent to a discussion, Méhely provided in tabular format body proportion for specimens collected in different parts of the country), scale numbers, color pattern, distribution (first the overall distribution is discussed, afterwards all records from the territory of Hungary were listed and commented upon in detail) and ecology.

Two species, *Lacerta taurica* and *Lacerta sicula*, are presented on 14 separately inserted pages. These were written during the early

Table 1. Content and page length of different chapters of *Herpetologia Hungarica*.

Volume/Heading	Number of Pages
Volume 1	
Introduction: role of reptiles in nature and their place in human culture, morphology, functional anatomy, ecology, distribution and phylogeny.....	50
Description of the Squamata.....	1
Description of the lizards.....	16
Keys for the Hungarian lizards.....	1
<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i> (detailed description).....	11
<i>Ophisaurus apus</i> (detailed description).....	14
<i>Anguis fragilis</i> (detailed description).....	30
<i>Lacerta</i>	1
Keys for the Hungarian <i>Lacerta</i>	1
<i>Lacerta viridis</i> (detailed description).....	38
<i>Lacerta agilis</i> (detailed description).....	67
<i>Lacerta vivipara</i> (detailed description).....	34
<i>Lacerta praticola</i> (detailed description).....	20
<i>Lacerta muralis</i> : subsp. <i>Tiliguerta</i> , var. <i>Campestris</i> , forma <i>olivacea</i> (detailed description).....	80
<i>Ablepharus pannonicus</i> (detailed description).....	20
Ophidians.....	7
Hungarian Colubridae.....	1/2
<i>Tropidonotus natrix</i> (detailed description).....	16
<i>Tropidonotus tessellatus</i> (detailed description).....	12
<i>Zamenis gemonensis</i> forma <i>typica</i> and <i>Zamenis gemonensis</i> var. <i>Caspicus</i> (detailed description).....	17
<i>Coluber leopardinus</i> (detailed description).....	9
<i>Coluber quatuorlineatus</i> (detailed description).....	11
<i>Coluber longissimus</i> (detailed description).....	20
<i>Coronella austriaca</i> (detailed description).....	16
<i>Taraphis fallax</i> (detailed description).....	10
<i>Vipera</i>	2
<i>Vipera ursinii</i> (detailed description).....	14
<i>Vipera berus</i> (detailed description).....	60
<i>Vipera ammodytes</i> (detailed description).....	18
Separate pages	
<i>Lacerta taurica</i> (detailed description).....	11
<i>Lacerta sicula</i> (detailed description).....	3
Volume 2	
The morphology, origin and systematics of the turtles.....	22
Athecae.....	1
<i>Thecophora</i>	1
Hungarian species (general notes).....	1/2
<i>Testudo</i>	1/2
<i>Emys</i>	1/2
<i>Emys orbicularis</i> (detailed description).....	26
<i>Testudo graeca</i> (detailed description).....	25
Rhynchocephalia.....	1

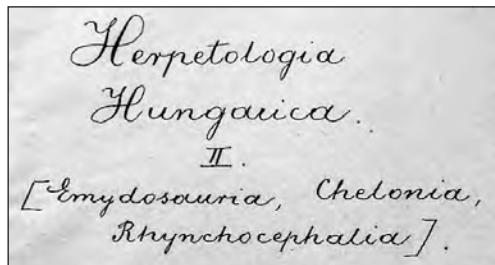


Fig 1. Text on the cover page of the second volume of *Herpetologia Hungarica*.

1900s, as *Podarcis tauricus* was discovered in Hungary only in 1902 (Méhely 1902) and *Podarcis siculus* was listed as a subspecies of *P. muralis* in the fair copy. Méhely started rewriting the *P. siculus* chapter, but managed to finish only three pages.

The second volume “*Herpetologia Hungarica [Emydosauria, Chelonia, Rhynchocephalia]*” (Fig. 1) is preserved with Méhely’s handwriting on 77 pages. This must be an original manuscript that was never submitted to the Academy, and possibly the master for the fair copy. Most of the pages are successively numbered starting with page 599 and ending with page 666. For an unknown reason Méhely penned multiple copies of four pages, which were marked by page number and letters (e.g. a, b, c). The volume contains two tables and a phylogenetic tree. For the two Hungarian species discussed in detail (i.e. *Emys orbicularis* and *Testudo graeca*) Méhely compiled their complete synonymy, presented their morphology, ecology, origin and distribution, and discussed the records from the literature and specimens preserved in museum collections originating from Hungary. Curiously, Méhely also included half a page with the order for the tuatara, Rhynchocephalia, the old name for Sphenodontia.

Méhely used a pleasing Hungarian language with many original, yet traditional expressions. His wording is logical, easy to understand, and delightful to read. His handwriting is clean, uniform and with relatively few corrections (Fig. 2).

Plates

Méhely planned 39 colored plates (Table 2) for the book but he never succeeded in finishing all of them. While he was writing the text and/or drawing the plates he often changed his opinion on the number of plates and drawings that should be included. We successfully traced these changes, as AELTE stores four different plate list drafts compiled by Méhely. The plates reached different stages; some were never drawn, whereas others were printed in several versions (print proofs) stored variously at AELTE and HNHM. We have arranged them into five groups, as follows:

- 1) Illustrations that were never prepared (or for which no evidence survives). Four species.
- 2) Photographs that could have served as models for the plates. Two are known, one (*Tarentola mauritanica*) is reproduced in Korsós & Horváth (1992: 41).
- 3) Original watercolor with no plates printed. Two are known. The aquarelle depicting *Lacerta horvathi* Méhely, 1904 (Pl. 8 in Table 2) is preserved in HNHM (Korsós & Horváth 1992), and was reproduced in Korsós (2002). Another aquarelle (Pl. 37 in Table 2) is in AELTE. It depicts *Mauremys rivulata* (Valenciennes, 1833) and was reproduced in Korsós & Horváth (1992: 42).
- 4) Print proofs. Nine are preserved (Fig. 3).
- 5) Printed, 22 plates with 2,500 copies of each. Six are available in proof stages as well.

Originally Méhely planned to paint two separate plates for *Lacerta oxycephala* and *Lacerta mosorensis*, but later decided to place them on a single plate (Pl. 7). Plate 11, now depicting four *Lacerta muralis* and four *Lacerta fiumana* was planned to show a male and a female *Lacerta serpa*, now *Podarcis siculus* (Rafinesque-Schmaltz, 1810) only. This species was never depicted, or the drawing did not survive. Black and white drawings were planned for *Lacerta major*, but these were never finished or did not survive. Black and white photographs should have been included in the text, depicting

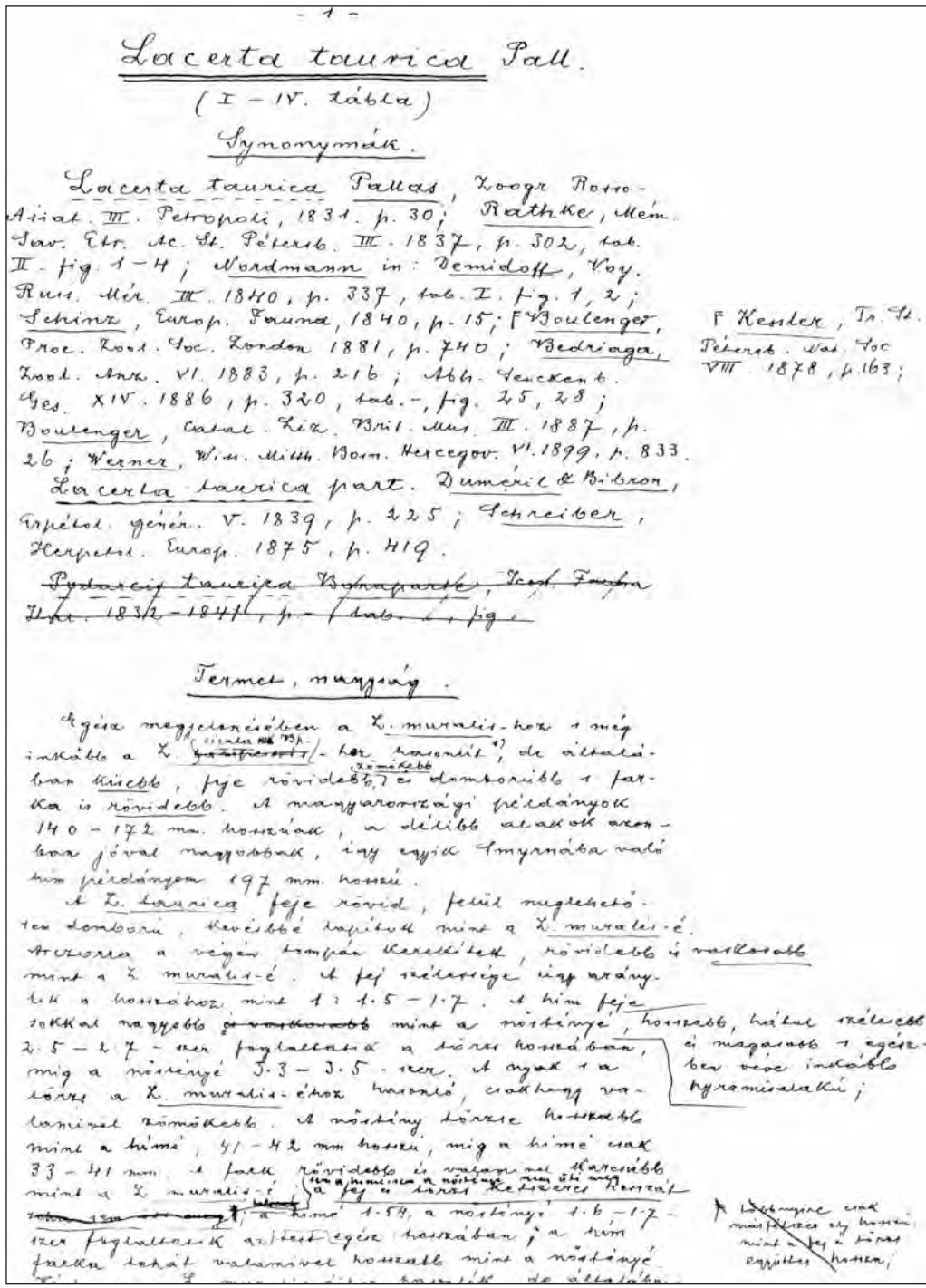
Fig 2. First page from the *Lacerta taurica* chapter of Herpetologia Hungarica in Mélhy's handwriting.

Table 2. Account of plates planned for *Herpetologia Hungarica*.

Plate No.	Name of the Plate	Specimens Portrayed	Production Stage	Present Name of the Taxon
1	* <i>Tarentola mauritanica</i> L.	One	Ph (AELTE)	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
2	* <i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i> L.	One	PP (AELTE)	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
3	<i>Ablepharus pannonicus</i> Fitz.	Three	P	<i>Ablepharus kitaibelii fitzingeri</i> Mertens, 1952
4	<i>Anguis fragilis</i> L.	♀, ♂ & juv.	P	<i>Anguis fragilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
5	<i>Ophisaurus apus</i> Pall.	One	P	<i>Pseudopus apodus</i> (Pallas, 1775)
6	<i>Algiroides nigropunctatus</i> DB.	[♀, ♂]	P	<i>Algiroides nigropunctatus</i> (Duméril & Bibron, 1839)
7	<i>Lacerta oxycephala</i> DB., <i>Lacerta mosorensis</i> Kolomb.	One each	PP (HNHM)	<i>Dalmatolacerta oxycephala</i> (Duméril & Bibron, 1839), <i>Dinarolacerta mosorensis</i> (Kolombatovic, 1886)
8	<i>Lacerta Horváthi</i> Méh.	Two	Wc (HNHM)	<i>Iberolacerta horvathi</i> (Méhely, 1904)
9	<i>Lacerta praticola</i> Evers.	♀	P	<i>Darevskia praticola</i> (Eversmann, 1834)
10	<i>Lacerta vivipara</i> Jacq.	[♀, ♂]	P	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i> (Jacquin, 1787)
11	* <i>Lacerta muralis</i> Laur., * <i>Lacerta fiumana</i> Wrn.	Color variants, four each	PP (HNHM)	<i>Podarcis muralis</i> (Laurenti, 1768), <i>Podarcis melisellensis fumanus</i> (Werner, 1891)
12	* <i>Lacerta fiumana</i> Wrn.	[♀, ♂]	PP (AELTE)	<i>Podarcis melisellensis fumanus</i> (Werner, 1891)
13	<i>Lacerta taurica</i> Pall.	Color variants, 5 ♀, 2 ♂	PP (HNHM), P	<i>Podarcis tauricus</i> (Pallas, 1814)
14	<i>Lacerta muralis</i> Laur.	♀, ♂	P	<i>Podarcis muralis</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
15	* <i>Lacerta viridis</i> Laur.	♂	PP (AELTE)	<i>Lacerta viridis</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
16	* <i>Lacerta viridis</i> Laur.	♀	PP (AELTE, HNHM)	<i>Lacerta viridis</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
17	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> L.	♂	P	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
18	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> L.	♀	P	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
19	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> L.	Color variants, 4 ♀, 4 ♂	P	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
20	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> L. (forma <i>rubra</i> Laur.)	♂	P	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
21	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> L. (forma <i>rubra</i> Laur.)	♀	P	<i>Lacerta agilis</i> Linnaeus, 1758
22	* <i>Tropidonotus natrix</i>	—	NE	<i>Natrix natrix</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
23	<i>Tropidonotus tessellatus</i>	One	PP (HNHM), P	<i>Natrix tessellata</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
24	<i>Zamenis gemonensis</i> Laur.	One	PP (HNHM), P	<i>Hierophis gemonensis</i> (Laurenti, 1768)

Plate No.	Name of the Plate	Specimens Portrayed	Production Stage	Present Name of the Taxon
25	<i>Zamenis caspius</i> Iwan.	One	P	<i>Dolichophis caspius</i> (Gmelin, 1789)
26	* <i>Zamenis Dahlii</i> Fitz.	—	NE	<i>Platyceps najadum</i> (Eichwald, 1831)
27	* <i>Coluber longissimus</i> Laur.	One	PP (AELTE)	<i>Elaphe longissima</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
28	<i>Coluber leopardinus</i> Bonap.	One	P	<i>Zamenis situla</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
29	* <i>Coluber quatorlineatus</i> Lacèp.	One	PP (HNHM)	<i>Elaphe quatuorlineata</i> (Lacépède, 1789)
30	* <i>Coronella austriaca</i> Laur.	One	Ph (AELTE)	<i>Coronella austriaca</i> (Laurenti, 1768)
31	<i>Tarbophis fallax</i> Fleischm.	One	P	<i>Telescopus fallax</i> (Fleischmann, 1831)
32	* <i>Coelopeltis lacertina</i> Wagl.	—	NE	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i> (Hermann, 1804)
33	<i>Vipera Ursinii</i> Bonap.	[♀]	P	<i>Vipera ursinii rakosiensis</i> Méhely, 1893
34	* <i>Vipera macrops</i> Méh.	—	NE	<i>Vipera ursinii macrops</i> Méhely, 1911
35	<i>Vipera berus</i> L.	♂	PP (HNHM), P	<i>Vipera berus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
36	* <i>Vipera ammodytes</i> L.	[♀]	PP (AELTE, HNHM)	<i>Vipera ammodytes</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
37	<i>Clemys caspica rivulata</i> Val.	[♂]	Wc (AELTE)	<i>Mauremys rivulata</i> (Valenciennes, 1833)
38	<i>Emys orbicularis</i> L.	[♀]	PP (AELTE), P	<i>Emys orbicularis</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)
39	<i>Testudo graeca</i> L.	♀, ♂	PP (AELTE), P	<i>Testudo graeca</i> Linnaeus, 1758

NOTES

* – Plate names preceded by an asterisk do not appear on the plate but were obtained from Méhely's lists.
 [♀, ♂], [♀], [♂] – Gender symbols placed in square brackets do not appear on the plate.

Production Stage:

Ph - photographs that could have served as models for the plates

PP - print proofs, printed in several versions

P - printed with 2,500 copies of each

Wc - original watercolor with no plates printed

NE - non-existent: illustrations that were never prepared (or nothing survived)

Location:

AELTE – located in the Archive of the Eötvös Loránd University's Library

HNHM - located in the Historical Collection of the Hungarian Natural History Museum

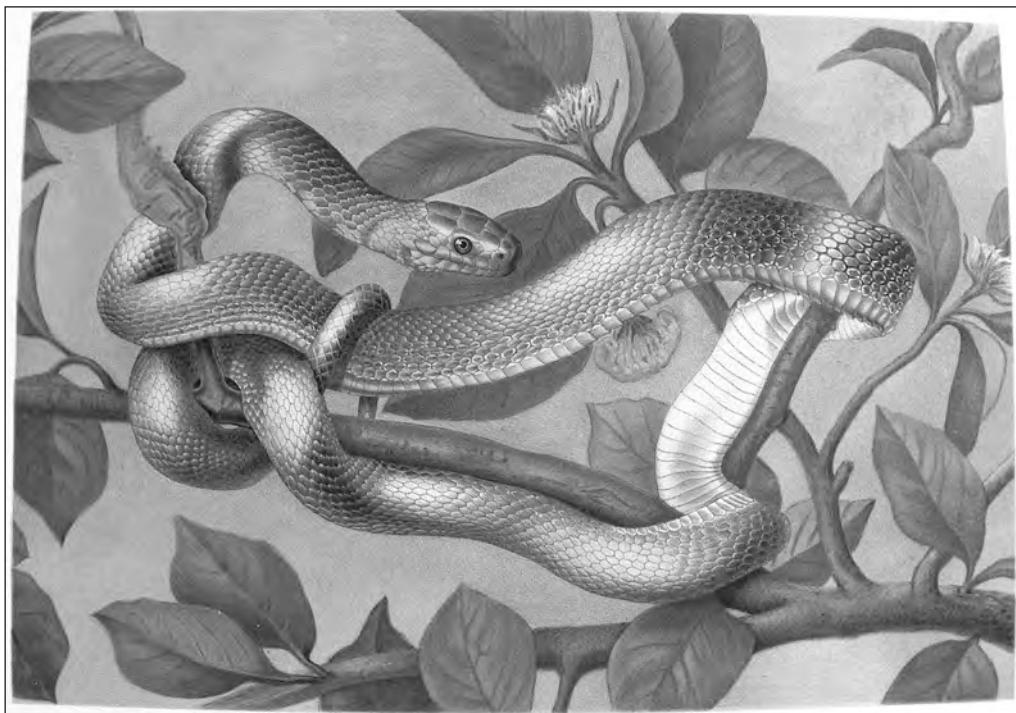


Fig 3. Print proofs of plate 27 depicting *Elaphe longissima* (Laurenti, 1768).

Chelonia mydas (Linnaeus, 1758), *Caretta caretta* (Linnaeus, 1758) and *Dermochelys coriacea* (Vandelli, 1761). These photographs, if ever prepared, have not survived. Similarly, Méhely first wanted to add a black and white photograph of *Chelonia imbricata* (Linnaeus, 1766) (now *Eretmochelys imbricata*) as well but dropped the idea later.

After the World War II, Méhely was charged and convicted for a crime against humanity and was imprisoned. He died in the prison in 1953 in Budapest at the age of 91. The manuscript has still not been published due to a lack of financial support. In Hungary the market would be rather small and with a translation to any other language it would be difficult to reproduce its literary qualities. Nonetheless, it is still our heartfelt hope that this Hungarian herpetological opus magnum one day can be published.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the staff of the Archive of the Eötvös Loránd University's Library in Budapest for allowing us to study the manuscript of *Herpetologia Hungarica*. Csaba Horváth is acknowledged for his valuable comments on the manuscript.

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The Origin of the Word ‘Gecko’

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The word ‘gecko’¹ is the widely used English vernacular name for fully-limbed members of the lizard group Gekkota (including the families Gekkonidae, Phyllodactylidae, Sphaerodactylidae, Diplodactylidae, Eublepharidae, and Carphodactylidae but excluding the reduced limbed Pygopodidae; Gamble et al. 2008a, 2008b; Han et al. 2004). ‘Gecko’ is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (2007) as “a house-lizard, found in the warmer regions of both hemispheres, remarkable for its peculiar cry, and for its power of climbing walls.” This word was also used by Linnaeus (1758) as a specific epithet in the binominal *Lacerta gecko* and subsequently it has served as the root for the genus *Gekko* Laurenti, 1768 and a number of higher order categories (e.g., Gekkonini, Gekkoninae, Gekkonidae, Gekkonomorpha, Gekkota).

The *OED* etymology derives ‘gecko’ from the Malay *gēkoq* (with a very faintly pronounced q), an onomatopoeic word based on the vocalization of certain species of geckos. The same source notes, however, that similar forms of the word occur in “the Indian languages, to which the earliest examples in English are due.” During a literature survey while compiling a paper on the *Sārārtha Sangrahaya*, a 4th century A.D. medical compendium from Sri Lanka (Gunasekara 1903; Kumarasinghe 1987) and its contribution to herpetology, we came across several early Sinhalese (the language of the largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka) works that refer to the word *gēgo*, which we believe may be a variant of ‘gecko’, and its linguistic antecedents. We here present evidence suggesting that the word ‘gecko’ may

have originated in Sri Lanka and trace its first usages in English.

Early Western works that refer to geckos

It is not surprising that English, or other northern European languages, did not, until relatively recently, have indigenous names for geckos, as the nearest native populations of geckos occur along the Mediterranean coast. As geckos are of no particular economic value and are not eaten – at least in this area of the world (but see Gibbons and Clunie 1984) there would have been no transport of these animals, and no common need for a name until at least the age of exploration (15th-17th centuries), when European travelers and naturalists began to return large numbers of exotic natural curiosities to their home countries. Certainly some early travelers and traders to southern Europe and the Middle East, as well as those participating in the Crusades and other medieval military campaigns, may have encountered geckos, but there seems to be no record that any vernacular name entered the lexicon of northern countries until relatively recently.

Among the earliest printed works in natural history to mention geckos is Gesner’s *Historiae Animalium* (1586), which mentioned references to these lizards from classical antiquity and used the Greek-derived name *ascalabotes* or the Latin *stellio* (both meaning a spotted lizard) or *lacertus facetanus* (clever lizard) to indicate geckos. Interestingly many of the early works mentioning geckos under one name or another confused them with either agamids or salamanders. For example, the term *stellio* has been applied to both agamids (and sometimes

¹ In this paper ‘gecko’ appears in single quotes when referring to the vernacular English word, it appears without quotes when referring to the lizard itself, and it is italicized only when used as a Latin specific epithet. All other non-English words, roots and stems, including variants of ‘gecko’ are italicized.

iguanids) as well as certain geckos (Seba 1734; Schneider 1792). This confusion was discussed by Houttuyn (1782) and Schneider (1792 – reprinted 1797, 1812, 1824) who reviewed both classical and modern sources dealing with geckos.

Another term applied, the Italian *tarentola* (also *tarantola* or *tarantula*) is a vernacular name for a spider associated with the town of Taranto in Apulia, Italy, which in turn is of Latin, and ultimately Greek, origin. The name was used for geckos, which, like the tarantula, have sometimes been regarded as venomous. This is also the root of the valid generic name *Tarentola* Gray, 1825, applied to a group of approximately 20 species of chiefly Mediterranean and North African geckos. Both this name and *lacertus facetanus* appear to apply unambiguously to *Tarentola mauritanica* specifically. Aldrovandi (1637; Fig. 1), Jonstonus (1657), Wurffbain (1683), and Jacobaeus (1686) — all published in Latin — also used the same terms as Gesner. The *OED* records Florio (1598) as the first English use of the variant *tarantola* in this reptilian context. None of these works, however, shed light on the source of the word gecko itself, although, as noted above, the *OED* suggests it may have entered English from British India in the early 18th century.

There appear to be no 17th century English references to the word gecko or its variants. However, the *OED* cites four 18th century references for the use of gecko or allied terms. The oldest of these (Lockyer 1711; Hamilton 1727) use the terms *chacco* and *Jackoa*, respectively, whereas the first use of 'gecko' itself cited by the *OED* is Goldsmith (1774), after which time the English usage seems to have rapidly settled on 'gecko', or more infrequently 'gekko'. However, 'gecko' had entered both other modern European languages and the formal Linnaean binomial system prior to Goldsmith's use. Both Linnaeus (1758) and Laurenti (1768), who coined the generic name *Gekko*, referenced Seba (1734),

who provided a detailed plate and associated text on geckos (Fig. 2), which probably served as the source for most subsequent 18th century information about geckos in the natural history literature.

Seba's (1734) plate 108 illustrated many individuals of the species now known as *Gekko gecko*, which ranges from India to Indonesia, and does not occur in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, his plate purports to illustrate a species he called *Gekko Ceilonicus* (Fig. 2). He indicated that the same species was also to be found in Ambo, Java, Macassar and other parts of the East Indies. It is most likely that the attribution of these geckos to Ceylon resulted from some confusion surrounding the origin of the accompanying natural history observations (many voyages to the Dutch East Indies called at Ceylon and tales from the two regions may have been confused), or from confusion over East Indian specimens transshipped via Sri Lanka, which might have been misinterpreted as their point of origin.

Seba (1734) himself cited three earlier works in his account of *Gekko Ceilonicus*: Wurffbain (1683), Jacobaeus (1686) and Valentijn (1726). As noted above, the two earlier of these works used only the Mediterranean names for geckos, but Valentijn (1726) reported in detail, in Dutch, on the *gekko* of Macassar and Java. Specifically he noted the distinctive vocalizations of geckos and reported that they were considered to be venomous by the Javanese, although he doubted that the supposed venom was as potent as reported by locals. Although some of Seba's information is clearly derived from Valentijn (1726), other information is not contained in any of the works cited. For instance, he states that the name *gekko* has to do with the sound the lizard makes and that the local people believe its calling is always an omen of imminent rain. This information may have been obtained by Seba from the (unknown) dealer or correspondent from whom he obtained the specimens figured in his plate 108. However, both Seba and Valentijn would have had access to an even earlier work

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Vlyssis Aldrouandi

Lacertus facetanus Tarantula quibusdam, aspera
cute instar Crocodili pronus, & supinus.

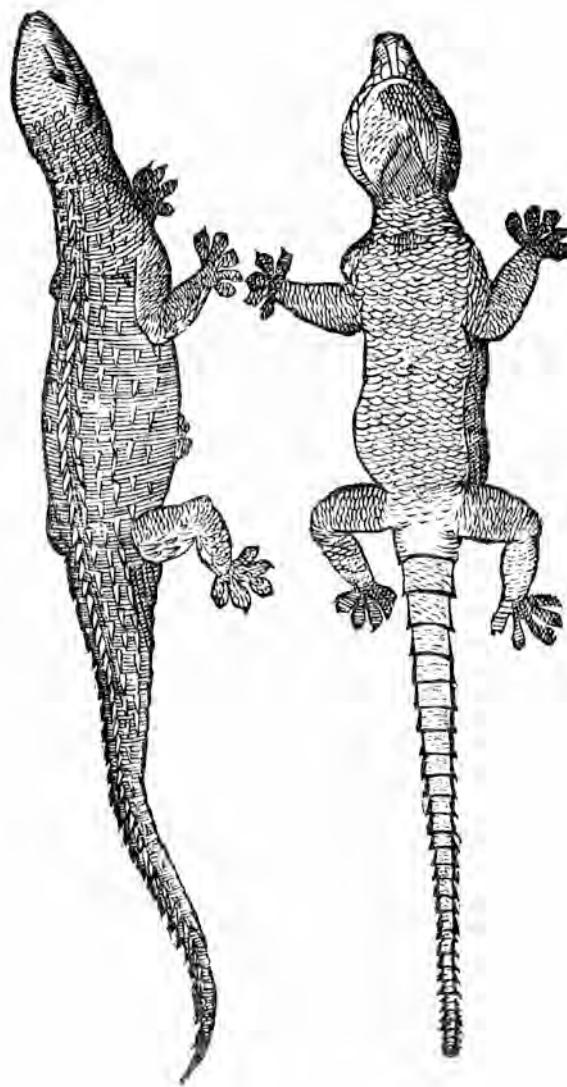


Fig. 1. Lacertus facetanus (Tarentola mauritanica), an early European depiction of a gecko from Aldrovandi (1637).

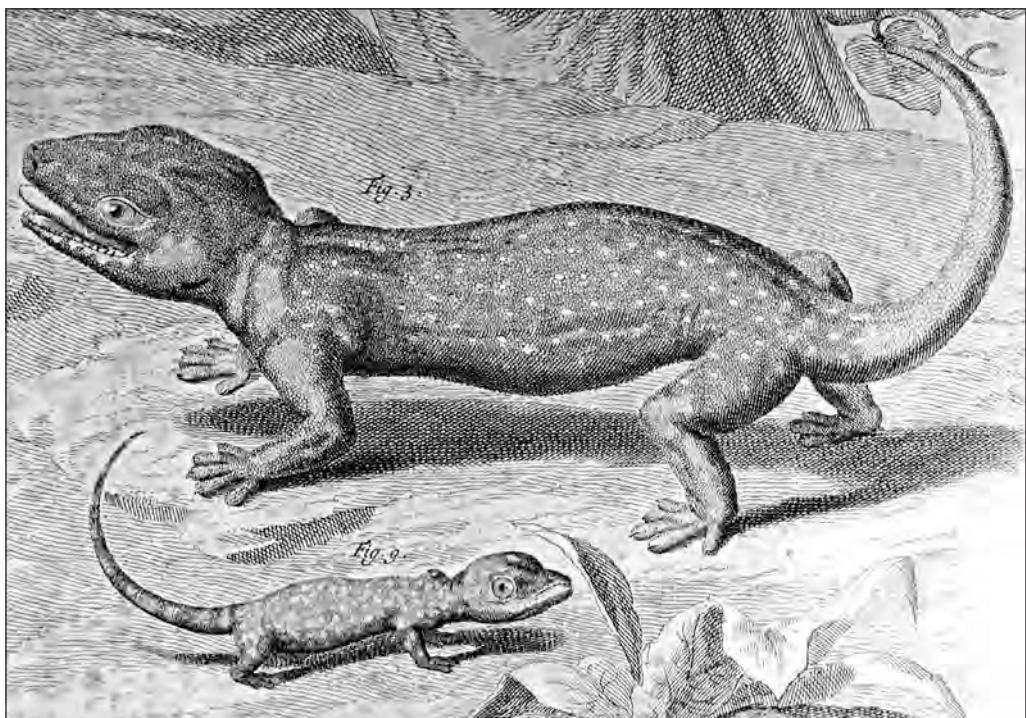


Fig. 2. Detail of plate 108 from Seba (1734) depicting tokay geckos (*Gekko gecko*), described by Seba as *Gekko Ceilonicus*.

that cited a variant of the word gecko. As was noted by Crooke (1903), Bontius in Piso (1658) commented “Nostratis ipsum animal apposito vocabulo gecco vocant; quipped non secus ac Coccyx apud nos suum cantum iterat, etiam gecko assiduo sonat, prius edito stridore qualem Picus emittit.” This specifically referred to a lizard encountered by Bontius during his sojourn in the East Indies (1627–1631). Another early source, Saar (1672), likewise commented on the *Jecko* which was a highly venomous ‘salamander’ in Batavia, which could kill with its bite, or poison with its urine.

Both of these very early mentions of geckos would suggest an East Indian, perhaps specifically Javanese, origin for the word gecko. This would be generally consistent with the *OED* etymology, as Malay, or bahasa Melayu, is an Austronesian language very similar to Indonesian (bahasa Indonesia). The *OED* attribution appears to be derived from one provided by Crooke (1903), who in turn cites Devic (1883) as the source (via French) for

the Malay origin of *gēkoq*. However, Crooke (1903), could not find evidence for such a word in Crawfurd (1852), who cited instead *tākē*, *tākēk* and *gokē* as Malay words for these lizards. Scott (1896) noted the many variants used in Malay, including all of the above, as well as *kēku*, *kēkuh*, *kēko*, *gaguh*, *gagoh*, *gago*, *kōkē*, and *tōkē*. *Tōkē* (source of the English common name ‘tokay’ for *Gekko gecko*) and its variants are widely employed today in Southeast Asia to refer to geckos of the genus *Gekko*. However, the term most commonly used appears to be *cicak* (pronounced *chichak*; S.N. Arsecularatne, pers. comm., April 2007), used chiefly for small house geckos. This and similar terms, have long been in use in Java as well. This is evidenced in the scientific name *Lacerta tjitja* Ljungh, 1804 – an onomatopoeic epithet based on a Javanese term and now regarded as a synonym of *Cosymbotus platyurus* (Schneider, 1792) (Bauer, 2000; see Carranza and Arnold, 2006 for evidence that this species belongs in the genus *Hemidactylus*), and confirmed by Scott (1896), who also listed many variants of this word.

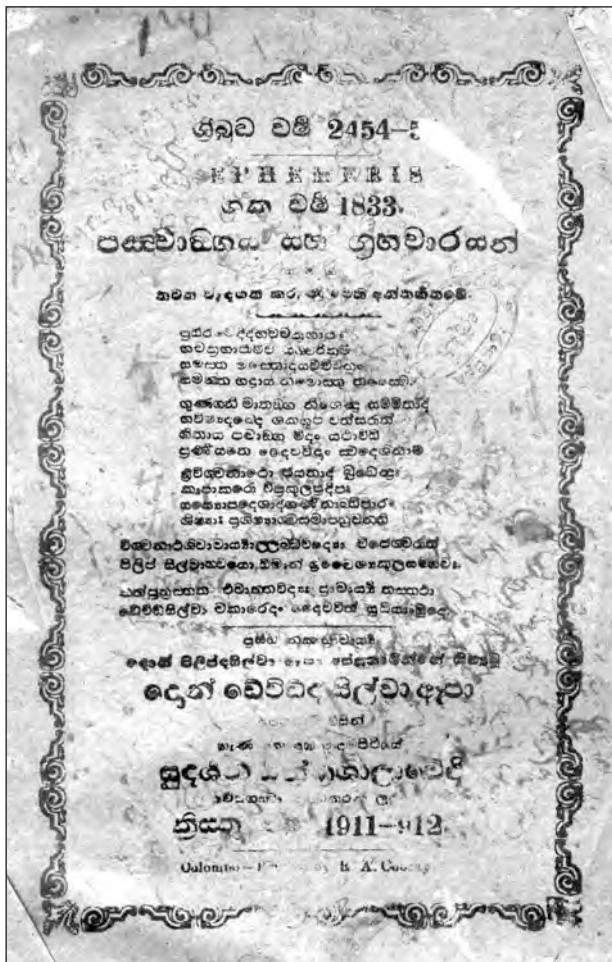


Fig. 3. Cover of the 1911 edition of images of Epā panchanga litha, a popular Sri Lankan almanac in which predictions relating to gecko vocalizations are published.

Early Sri Lankan works that refer to geckos

If the term 'gecko' did not enter European languages from Malay or some other Austronesian language, it is possible that it may have originated from Sri Lanka. During the period of activity of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC), 1602–1800, Dutch ships regularly called at Sri Lankan ports en route to Amboin, Java, and other areas of the East Indies. Indeed by 1640 the VOC had obtained complete control of the port of the southern Sri Lankan city of Galle from the Portuguese, and by 1656 Colombo

had been taken. Thus by the mid-17th century nearly all Dutch ships returning to Europe stopped in Sri Lanka, providing the possibility for European confusion regarding the origin of both local words for and beliefs about geckos.

The gecko fauna of Sri Lanka is relatively diverse, with representatives of the genera *Calodactylodes*, *Geckoella*, *Gehyra*, *Hemidactylus*, *Hemiphyllobactylus*, *Lepidodactylus*, *Cnemaspis*, and *Cyrtodactylus* (de Silva 1996; Manamendra-Arachchi 1997). Recent revisionary works (Batuwita & Bahir 2005; Bauer et al. 2007; Wickramasinghe & Munindradasa 2007; Manamendra-Arachchi et al. 2007) have resulted in the description of many new species in the latter two genera, bringing the number of known species to 42. Currently, the gecko is known by virtually all Sinhalese as *hūna*, *sūna*, *hūnuā*, *suhunā* or *sūnū*. At least some of these related terms have been in continued use since at least the 15th century (Gunaratana 1927; Wettasinghe 1951) and a variety of etymologies have been proposed for them (Monier-Williams 1899; Rhys-Davids & Stede 1921-1925; Geiger 1941; Sorata

1970), some relating to the vocalization of geckos and its presumed role in predicting events (and similar to the beliefs of southeast Asia as reported by 17th and 18th century Europeans; see above). The most popular almanac in Sri Lanka, *Epā panchanga litha* (Fig. 3), which began publishing in 1855 and continues to the present day, contains one section entitled 'hunu handa palapala' (= predictions based on gecko cries) and another section, 'hunu enga vetimae palapala' (= predictions based on body area on which a gecko falls).

Superficially these words seems to bear little semblance to 'gecko', however, they may be derived from a very similar term. Early traditional medical works written in Sanskrit use an alternative name. For example, the *Sārārtha Sangrahaya*, written in Sri Lanka by the physician King Buddhadāsa around 337–365 A.D. prescribed an herbal prescription for *gruha godha* (*gruha* = house, *godha* = *goya* = lizard = gecko) bite. Likewise, both the *Prayoga-Ratnavali*, a medical treatise written by the High Priest of the Mayurapada Monastery around 1283–1293 A.D. and the *Warayogasaraya*, a medical work written by the High Priest of the Monaragammana Monastery around 1288–1303, A.D. included prescriptions referring to geckos as *gruha godha*. The variant *grūhagodhikā* occurs in the *Amarakosa*, a Sanskrit dictionary compiled around the 9th to 10th centuries A.D.

An early work written in Pāli, *Jathaka Atuwawa Getapadaya* (A glossary of terms of Jathka stories) records the word *gharagolikā* as the equivalent of the modern Sinhalese *gēsuhūnuwo* (*gē* = house and *suhūnuwo* or *suhūnūā* = gecko) (Jayatilleke 1943; Hettiarachchi 1983; Sannasgala 1992). This work is considered by modern Sinhalese scholars and historians to have been written around the 12th century A.D., but its traditional attribution to the Reverend High Priest Buddhagosha has been called into question. The *Abhidhānappadipikā* (a dictionary of Pāli synonyms and homonyms), complied by the Reverend High Priest Moggallana of the Jetawan Monastery in Polonnaruwa in about 1157 A.D., likewise records *gharagolikā*, as well as *sarabu* as terms for geckos (Tissa 1960; Piyaratana 1996).

Most interestingly, two early lexicons, the *Piyummala* (or *Pium-mal Nighantuwa*; Batuvantudave 1892; Fig. 4), variously believed to have been written during the Polonnaruwa Period (11th–12th centuries AD;

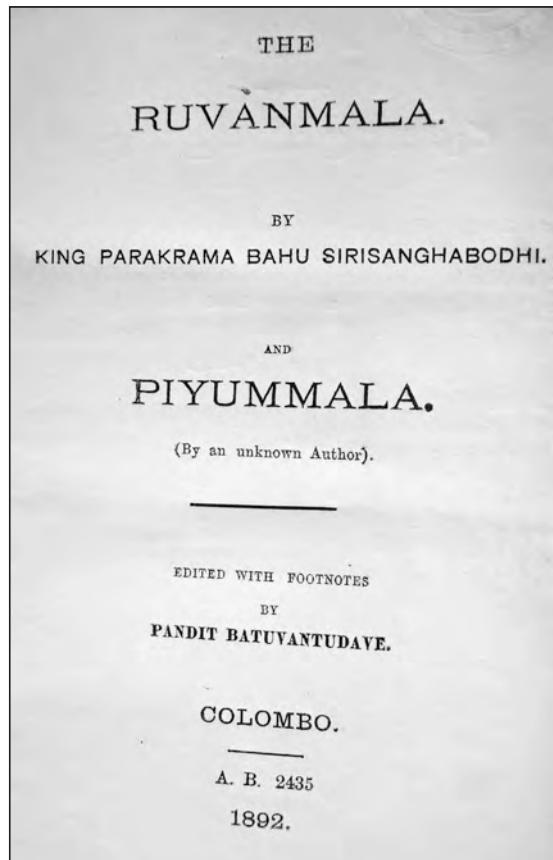


Fig. 4. Title page of the first printed edition of *The Ruwanmala and Piyummala* complied by Batuvantudave in 1892. Both works use the Elu name *gēgo* to refer to geckos.

Abey siriwardehana 2004), the last years of the 12th century (Godakumbura 1955), or between 1270 and 1293 (Sannasgala 1961), and the *Ruwanmala Nigantuwa* (also known as the *Ruwanmala, Nam nuwan mala, Nāmaratna mālāwa*, or *Ruwan mē*; Wijayasekara 1914; Dharmabandu 1954; Fig. 5) attributed to King Parākramabāhu VI of Kotte (reigned 1412–1467 AD) record *gēgo* (*gē* = house + *go* = *goya* = lizard = house lizard) as the Elu (the precursor of modern Sinhala) name for gecko. This may have originated from the earlier Sanskrit name *gruha goda* (*gruhua* = *ge* = dwelling, *goda* = *go* = *goya* = lizard), and is apparently the oldest Elu or Sinhala name for geckos, dating back as much as 1000 years.

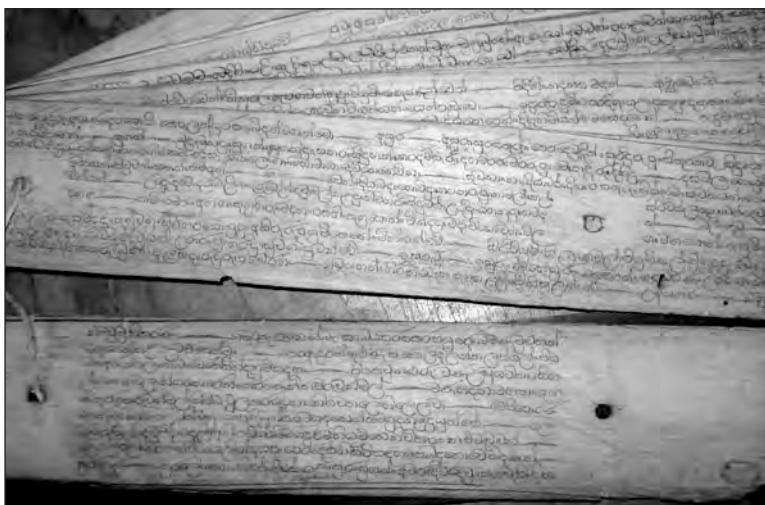


Fig. 5. Several centuries old ola leaf manuscript (5.4 cm x 49 cm) of the Ruwanmal Nighantuwa from the collection of the University of Peradeniya Library. For over one thousand years ola leaves were used to record Sri Lankan religious, medical, botanical and other literary texts. Manuscripts were engraved with a pointed metal instrument on the leaves of the talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) which were then treated with oil and lampblack which sank into the inscribed lettering and was then wiped away from the surface of the leaf.

Thus, the early Sanskrit, Pāli and Sinhala names given to geckos in Sri Lanka, such as *gruha godha*, *gèsuhūnuā* and *gēgo*, clearly derive from two components: *ge* or *gruha* = dwelling or house and *goya* or *suhūnuā* = lizard = gecko. The component *ge* is used in Sri Lanka today in other names indicating animals that occur in or around houses. For example, *ge kurulla* = house bird (*Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)) and *ge gemba* = house toad (*Bufo melanostictus* Schneider, 1799). The *Ruwanmal* also records *gē kobo* = house dove or pigeon (probably *Chalcophaps indica* (Linnaeus, 1758)). These root words are believed to be of Indo-Aryan origin and thus suggest an autochthonous Sri Lankan — or at least South Asian — origin, of non-onomatopoeic derivation, for a putative precursor to the word gecko.

Early European works mentioning Sri Lankan reptiles

The 13th century (or earlier) Elu term *gēgo* would appear to be a likely precursor to

‘gecko’. Unfortunately, early European works about Sri Lanka, all written more than four centuries later, provide no insight. Philippus Baldaeus (1672) published notes on sea snakes, the rat snake, the cobra and the viper as well as on snakebite and indigenous treatment in Ceylon in a three page chapter of his book on the Indies, which was translated and published in English in 1703. Baldaeus also mentioned the existence of frogs, toads and tortoises, but did not mention geckos. About a decade later Robert Knox (1641–1720), an Englishman who was in Sri Lanka as a prisoner for nearly twenty years, published the first detailed account of Sri Lanka in English, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (Knox 1681). Included in this work are some pages devoted to his observations on a number of reptiles (snakes, skinks, monitors and crocodiles). Knox’s chapter on reptiles is the first account of reptiles of Sri Lanka published in the English language. In it he recorded the Sinhalese names of many animals, plants, and other “natural products.” Unfortunately, Knox did not record either the Sinhala or the English vernacular names for

geckos — although he did record a popular local belief about geckos accurately: "... there is a little creature much like a lizard, which they look upon altogether as a prophet, whatsoever work or business they are going about; if he cries they will cease for a space reckoning that he tells them there is a bad planet rules at that instant." Knox's work is yet another uncited source that might have provided information for Seba's (1734) account of *Gecko Ceilonicus* and Seba's familiarity with it may have contributed to his belief that his specimens originated from Sri Lanka.

Likewise, later western authors discussing the Sri Lankan herpetofauna did not touch upon the subject of the local names for gekkonid lizards. Heydt (1744) wrote about large pythons and their food as well as about rat snakes, cobras, crocodiles, two varanids, fresh water terrapins and various lizards. By the time the first scientific treatments of the fauna were provided by Edward Frederick Kelaart (1819–1860), James Emerson Tennent (1804–1869), and William Ferguson (1820–1887), the term 'gecko' (or variants thereof) was already firmly established in both Latin binomial nomenclature and English and was accepted as the appropriate vernacular name for these lizards in all parts of the world where they occurred.

Cross-Cultural Influences and Conclusions

There is ample evidence that cultural and economic exchange between Sri Lanka and Malaysia and Indonesia existed since pre-Christian times (Casparis, 1961; Paranavitana 1966). For example, Paranavitana (1966) presented evidence of a pre-Christian seaport at the site of what is now Hambantota from which Sri Lankans navigated to other countries including Malaysia, and that sailors visited Sri Lanka from Malaysia. Kekulawala (1982) presented evidence of cultural connections between Java and Sri Lanka during the 6th-7th centuries A.D. and later, around the 9th century,

a king of Ceylon played a decisive role in a war in Malaysia. In the 12th century, during the reign of King Nissankamall, there were many contacts to Malaysia (Paranavitana 1966) and at times, parts of Austronesian-speaking Asia were under the rule of Indian kings, through which cultural and linguistic ties to Sri Lanka existed. Perhaps most significantly, during part of the 13th century, the "Malay" or Jāvaka ruler Chandrabahānu invaded Sri Lanka, defeated the Polonnaruwa Kingdom and established a short-lived kingdom in the present area of Jaffna (Geiger, 1930; Paranavitana 1966).

The above facts indicate the existence and influence of Sri Lankan customs and culture over Malaysia and *vice versa* for several centuries prior to the arrival of a permanent European presence in Sri Lanka. Several possibilities thus exist to explain the widespread use of the word gecko. It may have a single origin in the Austronesian-speaking region and could have spread to Sri Lanka, perhaps during the 13th century occupation, and thence to the west; it might have a Sri Lankan origin, as supported by the *Piyummala* and *Ruwanmal Nigantuwa*, and have spread to Malaysia and Indonesia and either independently to the west or via southeast Asia to the west; or it may have had independent derivations, one onomatopoeic, the other not, in southeast and south Asia, respectively. Scott (1896) summed up the etymological uncertainty of his time when he stated "from one of these [Malay] forms, or from an Indian or other name of similar form" ... "were drawn two forms which appear in English use of the eighteenth century, *chacco* and *jacco*." Existing evidence for the derivation of the word 'gecko' remains equivocal, but it is clear that the etymology for gecko provided by the *OED* is not as simple as it would appear and we suggest that the use of the word *gēgo* in Sri Lanka possibly as much as one thousand years ago is evidence of its Elu or Sinhala origin.

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